Checklist: Searching the Web for Reliable Information

**1. Content specialist:**

* Does the site cover the topic comprehensively? Accurately?
* Can you understand what is being said? Is it written above or below your level of understanding?
* What is unique about this site? Does it offer something others do not?
* Are the links well-chosen? sufficient?
* Currency: Can you tell: the date the information was created? the publication date? the date the material was last revised? Are these dates meaningful in terms of the subject matter?
* Would you get better information in a book? an encyclopedia?

**2. Authority/Credibility specialist:**

* Who is responsible for this site? Who sponsors it? Hint: truncate each section of the URL back until you are able to find the sponsor.
* What are his/her credentials?
* Have the authors of the site cited their own sources? Are the sources documented appropriately?
* What is the domain name? Does it end in .com, .gov, .edu, .org, .net? Is it a personal page?
* Is that a meaningful clue in evaluating the site? (You can't always judge a web page by its suffix. Some commercial sites provide solid information. Some university sites offer less-than-serious personal pages to graduate students.)
* Who else links to the site? (You can perform a *link check* in AltaVista or Google by entering "link:webaddress" in the search box. Is it linked to by reliable sites? What do other sites say about this one?

**3. Bias/purpose specialist:**

* Why was this site created? (to persuade, inform, explain, sell, promote, parody, other?)
* Is it a personal, commercial, government or organization site?
* Is there any bias? Is only one side of the argument presented? Does it appear that any information is purposely omitted? Is there a hidden message? Is it trying to persuade you or change your opinion? Is the bias useful to you in some way?
* Can you distinguish facts from opinion?

**4. Usability/design specialist**

* Is the site easy to navigate (user-friendly)?
* Is there a well-labeled contents area?
* Do all the design elements (graphics, art, buttons, etc.) enhance the message of the site? Is there consistency in the basic formats of each page?
* Are there any errors in spelling or grammar?
* Do the pages appear clean, uncluttered?
* Do the links on the site work?